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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000185

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STATE FOR WHA AND USOAS

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SUBJECT: A/S SHANNON'S MEETING WITH HAITIAN INTERIM PRIME
MINISTER LATORTUE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Timothy M. Carney for Reasons: 1.4 (b
and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On January 20, Haitian interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue told WHA Assistant Secretary Thomas ¶A. Shannon that Haiti is prepared to hold elections February 7 and March 19, and their success would be determined by Haitians' confidence in the voting structure. The PM expects most of the population to turn out and vote, but stressed that security must improve. He said electoral observers are necessary to minimize the possibility that results will be contested. On imprisoned activist Father Jean-Juste, the PM said he had worked out a deal that would allow Jean-Juste to be released; should that deal fall apart, he said he and President Alexandre are prepared to sign an amnesty document to free the priest. The PM shared he would travel January 24 to Trinidad and Tobago to meet with Prime Minister Manning to ease tensions with CARICOM. End Summary.

Stage is Set for February 7 First Round

¶2. (C) PM Latortue told the A/S he is "counting down the days" until February 7 so that he could resign and remain in a caretaker capacity until the newly-elected president is sworn in March 29 and names his own prime minister. Latortue said Haiti will be ready for the March 19 runoff between the two candidates who win the most votes in the first round of polling February 7. "It'll be even better if we have one candidate" the PM mused, referring to the possibility that established front runner Rene Preval may avoid a run-off. Latortue said the success of the elections would be determined by Haitians' confidence in the voting structure. He said he is "very confident" that all national identification cards would be distributed ahead of February 7, noting 75% have already been picked up.

¶3. (SBU) Latortue said that only the private sector and civil society are concerned that February 7 would not be a viable date to hold elections. The PM said that he had spoken with prominent members, including G-184 leader Andy Apaid and the Chamber of Commerce's Reginald Boulos, to allay their fears and told us that the private sector is now going towards elections. The PM said Apaid agreed to cease his verbal attacks on MINUSTAH and referred to SRS Valdes as a "gentleman." The PM also expressed his confidence that the

Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) Director General Jacques Bernard and the nine CEP members were all working closely together to ensure elections are held February 7. (Comment: Both Apaid and Boulos underscored to Core Group senior officials January 21 that they want the February 7 date to be realized. Boulos added that the private sector had begun a media campaign urging people to vote. End Comment.)

Security is Paramount to Ensure High Voter Turnout

14. (C) The PM ventured that candidates who "have no chance (of winning)" are loudly complaining about a lack of security. Nevertheless, Latortue judged that most of the Haitian population will turn out to vote on election day. He was hopeful that a MINUSTAH operation, conducted jointly with the Haitian National Police (HNP), would occur prior to February 7. (Note: SRSV Valdes has separately told us no major operation is planned prior to elections, but that efforts to control ingress and egress from Cite Soleil will be enhanced. End Note). The PM stressed that security must improve, particularly in Cite Soleil, prior to voting day to "decrease the influence of gangsters." The PM told us the CEP and IGOH had made a final decision to place voting centers on the periphery of Cite Soleil, and not within it. He suggested undertaking actions that would produce "psychological encouragement," including the deployment of U.S. police or marines the week preceding the elections. He further recommended the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard make a port call in Port-au-Prince o/a February 4-5. The PM said "if Haitians see U.S. helicopters flying over, they will go out and vote."

Jean-Juste Case Soon to Be Resolved

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15. (C) Latortue told A/S Shannon he held meetings January 19 with papal nuncio Archbishop Mario Giordiana, interim President Boniface Alexandre, and Justice Minister Henri Dorleans to discuss the case of imprisoned priest Gerard Jean-Juste. The PM explained that the investigating judge had dropped the murder (of journalist Jacques Roche) charge and now has to decide guilt or innocence for the misdemeanor crime of illegally holding state property (weapons), and if guilty what sentence he would impose upon Jean-Juste. The minimum sentence would be six-months. Counting time already served Jean-Juste could be immediately released. If the judge decides to sentence Jean-Juste to a longer jail term, the Prime Minister told A/S Shannon that he and President Alexandre are prepared to sign an amnesty document and immediately free Jean-Juste from custody. (Note: Jean-Juste's attorney filed an appeal which could further delay the case ten working days or more, see septel).

T&T overtures to Haiti on behalf of CARICOM

16. (C) The PM told A/S Shannon that he had received a letter from Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Patrick Manning (whom Latortue said he knows personally) January 19 inviting Latortue to visit ahead of the February 9 scheduled CARICOM meeting. Latortue traveled to Port of Spain January 24. Latortue hopes to "ease tensions with CARICOM and seek support for elections." Latortue told us he suggested a joint press conference with Manning in the latter's capacity as chair of CARICOM. The PM said the Haitian Ambassador to the OAS, Duly Brutus, would join him in Trinidad as part of the official delegation. (Note: Latortue will travel to Washington upon his return for a private visit and is available for meetings with WHA early January 28 to provide a readout from his trip to Trinidad, if requested. End Note).

Concern for Personal Security in Florida

¶7. (C) The Prime Minister shared his concerns for his own safety and that of his family once he returns to private life in south Florida at the end of his term. He said there are individuals who would seek vengeance for his role in the transition. A/S Shannon assured the PM that we would investigate options with Diplomatic Security for his personal safety once he is back in the U.S.

¶8. (C) Comment: The positive tone of the meeting in part resulted from the Prime Minister's confidence that elections would take place February 7. Latortue does not expect to stay in Haiti any longer than is necessary to see power transferred to the newly-elected government. We will continue to push him to publicly support MINUSTAH's role in maintaining security and holding the first round of elections on February 7 as scheduled. End comment.

¶9. (U) A/S Shannon has cleared on this message.
CARNEY